

Message Text

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53

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 OMB-01 DRC-01

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O 161740Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5975

INFO AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 2820

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, MOPS, HO, ES

SUBJ: JULY 7-9 BORDER INCIDENT WITH HONDURAS

RE: A. SAN SALVADOR 7772, B. TEGUCIGALPA 2903

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

1. IN WHAT SALVADORAN ARMED FORCE (FAS) OFFICIALS PRIVATELY TERM THE MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT SINCE THE 1969 WAR, HONDURAN AND SALVADORAN TROOPS ENGAGED IN A THREE-DAY GUNFIGHT (JULY 7-9) IN THE VICINITY OF LAS TABLAS, NEAR ARCATAO IN CHALATENANGO DEPARTMENT. ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE FAS SOURCE, SMALL NUMBER OF NATIONAL GUARDSMEN ON A ROUTINE PATROL NEAR THE BORDER (WHICH IS DISPUTED IN THAT REGION) DREW 15 ROUNDS OF MORTAR FIRE FROM HONDURAS TROOPS AT ABOUT 8:40 PM JULY 7. ADDITIONAL TROOPS WERE SENT TO THE AREA FROM CHALATENANGO AND BY JULY 9 ABOUT 230 SALVADORAN TROOPS WERE INVOLVED. WHILE SOURCE CLAIMS SALVADORAN TROOPS EXPENDED ABOUT 10,000 ROUNDS OF SMALL ARMS AMMUNITION AND 30 ROUNDS OF MORTAR FIRE, HE DID NOT ADMIT TO ANY SALVADORAN CASUALTIES NOR BOAST THAT THEY INFLICTED ANY ON THE
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OTHER SIDE.

2. AFTER THE INCIDENT A FIVE-MAN FAS TEAM SENT TO THE AREA ON JULY 10 MET WITH A NINE-MAN HONDURAN TEAM LED BY VICE CHIEF OF STAFF COL. GARCIA. BOTH SIDES AGREED TO RESTRAIN THEIR FORCES, AND THE SITUATION APPARENTLY QUICKLY RETURNED TO NORMAL. GENERAL STAFFS OF BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE ALSO MAINTAINED RADIO CONTACT SINCE THE INCIDENT TO ASSURE THAT SITUATION REMAINS UNDER CONTROL. SINCE GOES IS EVIDENTLY NOT INCLINED TO AGGRAVATE ITS RELATIONS WITH HONDURAS AND FEELS NO RPT NO NEED TO EXPLOIT THE INCIDENT FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSES, IT HAS NOT PUBLICIZED IT. THUS FAR, LOCAL PRESS HAS NOT CARRIED ANY REPORT OF THE INCIDENT WHATSOEVER AND IT HAS NOT BECOME COMMON KNOWLEDGE OTHERWISE.

3. AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, FAS BLAMED THE HONDURANS FOR PROVOKING THE INCIDENT. FAS OFFICERS SPECULATED TO US ABOUT THEIR APPRECIATION OF THE HONDURAN SITUATION, I.E., A WEAK LOPEZ GOVT TRYING TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE TEACHER'S STRIKE AND SEEKING TO FORESTALL A POSSIBLE COUP ATTEMPT BY CREATING PROBLEMS ON THE BORDER. THEIR SPECULATION IS NOT CONVINCING SINCE, APPARENTLY, THE GOH ALSO IS KEEPING A LID ON THE INCIDENT AND NOT TRYING TO EXPLOIT IT. WE ARE INFORMED THAT THE LOCAL MILITARY FORCES AT THIS PARTICULARLY REMOTE AREA DO NOT MAINTAIN DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS WITH THEIR HONDURAN COUNTERPARTS AND THAT COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE HIGH COMMANDS AND LOCAL COMMANDERS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER, PARTICULARLY ON THE HONDURAN SIDE, ARE PRECARIOUS AT BEST. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT SEEMS MOST LIKELY THAT THE INCIDENT RESULTED FROM OVERZEALOUSNESS OF LOCAL COMMANDERS QS TAKING INITIATIVES TO PROTECT THEIR TROOPS AND CAMPESINO POPULATIONS IN THE AREA RATHER THAN FROM A PREMEDITATED ATTEMPT BY HIGHER HEADQUARTERS OR AT THE GOVT LEVEL ON EITHER SIDE TO PROVOKE AN INCIDENT FOR POLITICAL EFFECT.

4. FAS HAS CONFIRMED THAT ONE RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHT WAS MADE DURING THE JULY 7-9 INCIDENT WITHOUT, OF COURSE, ACKNOWLEDGING ANY VIOLATION OF HONDURAN AIRSPACE. WE HAVE NO FURTHER INFO ON ALLEGED OVERFLIGHTS MENTIONED IN REF B. IN THE FUTURE, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO US IN OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GOES TO DISCOURAGE SUCH ACTIVITIES TO HAVE AS SPECIFIC INFO AS POSSIBLE SUCH AS IDENTIFYING MARKINGS OF AIRCRAFT, EXACT POSITION AND TIME OF INCIDENT. BETTER STILL, WE WOULD SUGGEST CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT SUCH INFO BE PASSED IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY BY HONDURAN MILITARY TO ITS FAS LIAISON WITH APPROPRIATE DENUNCIATIONS AND ADMONISHMENTS.

5. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH ME JULY 16 FONMIN BORGONOVO CONFIRMED THAT THE MILITARY HIGH COMMANDS ON BOTH SIDES HAVE RESTORED ORDER IN AREA AND ARE TAKING MEASURES TO PREVENT RECURRENCE. THEY ARE IN CLOSE AND CONTINUOUS CONTACT. I STRESSED TO BORGONOVO THE SERIOUSNESS OF

THE INCIDENT AND THE RISK THAT SIMILAR ONES COULD OCCUR AND GET
OUT OF CONTROL SO LONG AS THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES
REMAINS UNRESOLVED. I ENCOURAGED HIM TO DO WHAT HE COULD TO
ASSURE BETTER CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO MILITARY SIDES AND TO GET
ON AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE WITH THE BUSINESS OF SETTLEMENT OF
THE DISPUTE.
CAMPBELL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, AIRCRAFT, BORDER INCIDENTS, MILITARY EXERCISES, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, DIPLOMATIC PROTESTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 JUL 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SANSAS02820
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740190-0719
From: SAN SALVADOR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740745/aaaabmgk.tel
Line Count: 122
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 SEP 2002 by rowelle0>; APPROVED <25 MAR 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: JULY 7-9 BORDER INCIDENT WITH HONDURAS RE: A. SAN SALVADOR 7772, B. TEGUCIGALPA 2903
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, MOPS, HO, ES
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005